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Teaching Ephesians

Chapter Three

By

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We are sharing a special series about teaching the Book of Ephesians in small groups. If you haven't read the Introduction to the series, we invite you to [read it here](#).

Whether you are interested in studying Ephesians for the purpose of teaching it to small groups or for your own personal study, we believe you will find this series helpful.

Basic Premises for Studying Scripture

God is worth knowing

His Word is worth learning and obeying

Because God is worth knowing and His Word is worth learning, we will follow a proven method of knowing Him and learning His Word.

We will use the I – M – D – I method of Bible study:

Inductive – Methodical – Direct – Independent

Inductive study – “logical, objective, impartial reasoning” ... examining specifics of Scripture before reaching conclusions

Methodical study – “a way or path of transit” (Greek – methodos) ... focused on taking the proper path to gaining knowledge about God

Direct study – “relying on Scripture as the primary tool for learning”

Independent study – “original thinking combined with Spirit insight”

Observe (See and Record)

Question (Ask and Answer)

Interpret (Determine the Holy Spirit’s Intent)

Apply (How God’s Truth applies to your life)

Bible Study – The Group Process

We invite you to model the process of **observing, asking questions for interpretation, interpreting for meaning, and applying for discipleship** for your small group. This process may be new to some of the people in your group, so going through it with them for awhile may help them feel comfortable with how to do it.

One of the biggest mistakes people make in reading the Bible is trying to interpret the meaning of individual verses before observing everything in the verses. Studying in context also helps keep us from making incorrect interpretations. That means starting the observation process at the beginning of each Bible book.

The challenge in studying alone or with the group is trying to determine the meaning of passages in the Bible before assuring that we've observed everything in the passages and asked every possible question. We carefully answer all of the questions before reaching a conclusion to the meaning.

Read the Scripture and go through each step with your group. You may be able to cover observation, questions, interpretation and application in one meeting, but don't rush the process. It takes time to see everything in a text, ask good questions, get good answers to those good questions, interpret the meaning of the text and apply the meaning to life. If it takes two or three meetings to do that for each text, that's fine! The goal is to rightly divide God's Word, not finish by a certain date.

Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:1-3

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already ...

In the last lesson we saw that we are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Our citizenship is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. The building is fitted together in Christ and grows into a holy temple of the Lord, “in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:22)

This is an extraordinary truth for Christians to grasp. This is no usual lifestyle, no ordinary worldview, no casual belief system. Christianity is without a doubt a one-of-a-kind spiritual experience in the universe of God.

This continues the theme Paul began explaining earlier in this letter. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the Heavenly places in Christ. God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. God predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself. God has made us accepted in Christ. We are redeemed through the Blood of Jesus. We have forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God's Grace which He made to abound toward us. God made known to us the mystery of His will. We obtained an inheritance in Christ and were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise who is the guarantee of our inheritance until our redemption, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14)

We are not your usual religious people. We are sons and daughters of Almighty God!

Ephesians 3:1-3 in Greek

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles ... τουτου χαριν εγω παυλος ο δεσμιος του χριστου ιησου υπερ υμων των εθνων

For this reason ... *toutou charin*, “of this for reason” ... for this reason (for this cause) refers back to the previous sentence: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” The reason Paul refers to is that Christians, Jews and Gentiles, are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. The “therefore” of 2:19 reminds us of the larger context of Jesus abolishing “in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in

Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.”
The “two” refers to Jews and Gentiles who Jesus created into one new man through His blood.

I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles ... *egō Paulos ho desmios tou Christou Iēsou huper humōn tōn ethnōn*, “I Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles”
... Paul was under house arrest (prisoner) because he preached to Gentiles (e.g. Acts 22:21-22) about Jesus Christ (e.g. Acts 9:15-16; 23:6; 24:5-6; 26:32; 28:28-31) ... Paul appear to be sharing his special interest and concern for the Gentiles .. Jesus had called Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles (e.g. Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8; 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11) .. notice also that Paul called himself “the” prisoner of Christ Jesus (definite article appearing before Christ) .. It was Jesus who made Paul a prisoner to Him (e.g. Acts 9:15-16; 26:12-23) ...

if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you ... εἰγε
ηκουσατε την οικονομιαν της χαριτος του θεου της δοθεισης
μοι εις υμας

if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God ... *ei ēkousate tēn oikonomian tēs charitos tou theou*, “if indeed you have heard of the administration of the grace of God” ... the noun *oikonomian* is translated as “administration, household management, stewardship, fellowship, dispensation” ... it comes from the verb *oikonomeó* which means “to be a steward of a household, to manage a household” ... *oikonomian* can also refer to a period of time where someone manages a household ... the word comes from *oikos*, “a house,” and *nomos*, “law” and combines to mean “the law of the house” ... Jesus had given Paul the responsibility to manage the household the Lord was building (Jews and Gentiles becoming one new man who Jesus built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit) ... here are some of Paul’s other uses of the word ...

For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 1 Corinthians 9:17

... that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. Ephesians 1:10

... and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:9

... of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God. Colossians 1:25

Paul gave this “dispensation” a special name, of the grace of God (*tēs charitos tou theou*) ... Paul wrote about this special grace earlier in Ephesians (e.g. Ephesians 2:4-9) ... Gentiles had been “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise” ... they had “no hope” and were “without God in the world” ... It was because of God’s dispensation of Grace that Gentiles “who once were far off” had “been brought near by the blood of Christ” ... that’s what makes the Dispensation of the Grace of God so special ... because God determined before time began that He would eventually save Gentiles in the same way He saved Jews, Gentiles had an equal place in God’s family under Paul’s preaching ... they were “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” ...

which was given to me for you ... *tēs dotheisēs moi eis humas*, “having been given to me toward you” ... that’s why I said that Gentiles had an equal place in God’s family under Paul’s preaching ... Jesus gave Paul a special ministry in what Paul called the Dispensation of the Grace of God ... Paul mentioned this dispensation in chapter 1 — “that in the

dispensation of the fullness of the times ” — and details it here in chapter 3 ... notice that the dispensation of the Grace of God was “given” to Paul ... the verb *dotheisēs* is an aorist passive participle ... someone gave Paul the dispensation at a past time ... we know that Jesus gave the dispensation of the Grace of God to Paul for the Gentiles ... that’s what makes his meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem (e.g. Acts 15; Galatians 2) so important to understand ... Jesus gave Paul this dispensation many years earlier (Acts 9), but the other apostles didn’t understand what it meant until they met with Paul in Jerusalem to talk about the Gospel he preached and the Gospel they preached ... that’s why Paul wrote this in Galatians 2:7-9 — “But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the

circumcised.” ... notice what Paul called the “gospels” — “the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter” ... one is “for the uncircumcised” (Gentile) and one is “for the circumcised” (Jew) ... the interesting thing we note in Ephesians is that the Gospel Paul preached concerned both Jews and Gentiles — Jesus made one new man out of the two ...

There are people who believe Paul [was a fraud and not a true apostle of Christ](#) because of things he said and wrote about Gentiles, the Law and Grace. That’s what makes the study of Paul’s earlier letters and sermons important, along with his meeting with Peter, John and other apostles in Jerusalem.

how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already) ... οτι κατα αποκαλυψιν εγνωρισεν μοι το μυστηριον καθως προεγραψα εν ολιγω

how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery ... *hoti kata apokalypsin egnōristhē moi to mustērion*, “that by revelation he made known to me the mystery” ... the word *apokalupsin* means “an uncovering, unveiling, revealing, revelation” ... it’s the same word used in Revelation 1:1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.” ... Paul used the word *apokalupsin* in previous letters to churches to address what special information he had received:

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith.

ROMANS 16:25-26

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter ... And lest I should be exalted

above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-4, 7

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

GALATIANS 1:11-12

In Galatians 1, Paul claimed that the Gospel he preached was “not according to man” and that he had not “received it from man” and was not “taught it” ... Paul claimed that the Gospel he preached came through “the revelation of Jesus Christ” ... That’s the same thing Paul claimed in Ephesians ... He said that “He made known to me” ... the context demonstrates that Jesus Christ was the one who “revealed, uncovered, unveiled” something special to Paul ... that special something was “the mystery” ... *mustērion* means “a secret teaching” ... Jesus gave Paul a secret teaching about the Lord’s Good News (Gospel) ... in Romans Paul called it “my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ” ...

as I have briefly written already... *kathōs proegrapsa en oligō* ... it was something Paul had “briefly written already” in this letter ... it concerned “the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Ephesians 1:9-10) ... this “mystery” was “of His will” ... that’s the will of God ... according to God’s good

pleasure which He purposed in Himself (nothing outside of God pressured God to do this, it was His will and His will alone according to what pleased Him) ... that God might “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth” ... Paul explained that further in chapter two when he addressed what Jesus had done on the Cross to make one new man out of Jew and Gentile, something the other apostles didn’t know (as evidenced by their debate and final decision at the Jerusalem Council) ...

Observe – Write what you see

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already ...

EPHESIANS 3:1-3

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Question – Ask and answer questions based on observations

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Interpret – What is the Holy Spirit’s intent in these verses?

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Apply – How can you apply these spiritual truths to your life?

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Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:4-7

... by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

In the [last part of our study](#) (Ephesians 3:1-3), the Apostle Paul went into more depth about the “dispensation of the grace of God.” Paul mentioned this special “household management” in the first chapter of his letter to the Ephesians: “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in

Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him (Ephesians 1:10).

As Paul explained in the second chapter of his letter, Gentiles had been “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise.” They had “no hope” and were “without God in the world.” It was because of God’s dispensation of Grace that Gentiles “who once were far off” had “been brought near by the blood of Christ.” That’s what makes the Dispensation of the Grace of God so special. God determined before time began that He would eventually save Gentiles in the same way He saved Jews. Gentiles had an equal place in God’s family under Paul’s preaching. They were “no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”

Ephesians 3:4-7 in Greek

by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ... προς ο δυνασθε αναγινωσκοντες νοησαι την συνεσιν μου εν τω μυστηριω του χριστου

Paul's presentation about the revelation of the mystery that Jesus had given him continued in verse 4 ... *pros ho dynasthe* is "by which you are able" ... *dunasthe* means "to be able, to have power" ... the Ephesians had the ability to understand Paul's knowledge in the mystery of Christ and so do we ... we have plenty of evidence in Ephesians and other letters from Paul to grasp this truth ... Paul said they could "understand" his "knowledge" in the mystery ... the word "understand" is *noēsaí* and means "to perceive, think, apply mental effort to reach a conclusion" ... the word "knowledge" is *sunesin* and means "insight, a putting together in the mind" ... the word "mystery" is *mustērīō*, which Paul used six times in his letter to the Ephesians ...

- mystery of His will — “having made known to us the mystery of His will” 1:9
- the mystery — “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery” 3:3
- mystery of Christ — “by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” 3:4
- fellowship of the mystery — “and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery 3:9
- great mystery — “This is a great mystery” 5:32
- mystery of the gospel — “that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” 6:19

In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote about the mysteries of God — “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). Being a “steward” of the mysteries of God means being “a household manager” (*oikonomos*) of the mysteries (*mustērion*) of God. Paul was asking the Corinthians to consider him as a household manager (overseer) of God’s mysteries that Jesus had given him.

Colossians is a companion letter of Ephesians, meaning the same author wrote both letters about the same time and included similar information. It’s helpful to read Ephesians and Colossians together to see how Paul explained similar doctrines to two different churches. Paul mentioned the mystery four times in Colossians:

- “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.” 1:26
- “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” 1:27

- “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God.” 2:2
- “to speak the mystery of Christ” 4:3

Paul wrote Timothy about the “mystery of the faith” (1 Timothy 3:9) and the “mystery of godliness” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Paul wrote the Thessalonians about the “mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

Paul wrote the Romans about the “revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25).

The Gospel writers quoted Jesus as using the phrase “mystery of the kingdom” or “mysteries of the kingdom.” (e.g. Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10) to explain to His disciples that it was given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, “but to the rest it is given in parables, that ‘Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.’”

Jesus told the Apostle John to write about the “mystery of the seven stars” (Revelation 1:20). Jesus explained that the “seven stars” are the “angels of the seven churches” (Revelation 1:21).

As we study the context of each of the 28 uses of the word *mustérion*, we see that Paul referenced a particular secret that God had given him to give to the world of Gentiles and Jews. Even the other apostles (e.g. Peter, James, John) did not know about the details of that mystery until Paul revealed it to them (e.g. Acts 15; Galatians 2). The apostles knew about the mystery of the kingdom of God as Jesus revealed it to them. God did give Peter some insight through visions and the salvation of God-fearing Gentiles (Acts 10 –

11:18), but even Peter did not know the full details of the mystery Jesus had given Paul until the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15; Galatians 2). Paul knew about a great mystery, the mystery of Christ, as revealed to him by Jesus. Paul explained that in the next verse.

which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets ... ο εν ετεραις γενεαις ουκ εγνωρισθη τοις υιοις των ανθρωπων ως νυν απεκαλυφθη τοις αγιοις αποστολοις αυτου και προφηταις εν πνευματι

The words “in other ages” are *heterais geneais*, “other generations, other families, other ages.” The mystery Paul revealed was “not made known to the sons of men” in previous generations. Look through the Old Testament writings and you won’t find the particular mystery God revealed to Paul. The prophets mentioned in Ephesians 3 refers to the prophets of the 1st century AD, not the BC prophets (before Christ). The Holy Spirit revealed the mystery of Christ among the Gentiles to the Apostle Paul, who then revealed it to the other apostles and prophets.

that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel ... ειναι τα εθνη συγκληρονομα και συσσωμα και συμμετοχα της επαγγελιας αυτου εν τω χριστω δια του ευαγγελιου

This is similar to what Paul wrote the Colossians about the mystery God had given him to reveal to the world — “the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul explained this mystery as the Gentiles being “fellow heirs,” “of the same body,” “and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”

The words “fellow heirs” are a translation of the Greek word *sunklēronoma* (co-inheritor, joint heir). It hearkens back to what Paul wrote earlier in Ephesians about a particular relationship the Gentiles had with Jews as receiving the same inheritance: Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18. Paul also used the word *sunklēronoma* in his letter to the Romans (8:17).

Gentiles are fellow heirs “of the same body.” The Greek word is *sussōma* and means “joint body, belonging to same body, united in same body.” That is another way of saying what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

EPHESIANS 2:14-18

Gentiles are also “partakers of His promise.” The Greek words are *summetocha tēs epangelias* (joint partakers, fellow partakers of the officially sanctioned promise). Paul wrote about this promise earlier in his letter. Gentiles had been “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (2:12), but in Christ they were “joint parkers” with believing Jews of the promise of God and sealed for eternity — “in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (1:13). Gentiles and Jews would together receive “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3).

That is the mystery God gave Paul to manage “in Christ through the gospel.”

It is well to pause over a passage like this, and reflect that what seems now to be an axiom of religious thought, the equality of mankind in view of the offer of salvation, was once an immense and long-withheld discovery.

CAMBRIDGE BIBLE FOR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power ... ου εγενομην διακονος κατα την δωρεαν της χαριτος του θεου την δοθεισαν μοι κατα την ενεργειαν της δυναμεως αυτου

God made Paul a “minister” (*diakonos*, servant) of the mystery according to (*kata*, down from, by way of) “the gift of the grace” (*dōrean tēs charitos*, free gift of the favor, kindness) of God. Paul understood well why God had given him the responsibility of managing the household of the mystery of Christ. It was because of God’s free gift of grace.

This ministry, Paul wrote, was given to him “by the effective working” (*energeian*, productive work, energetic activity, divine energy) of God’s “power” (*dunameōs*, strength, might, power, ability to perform). Paul understood that God was the one able to accomplish the great work He had given Paul to do. Paul did not do what he did in his own power, but in the power of Almighty God. God’s grace and power were demonstrated in Paul’s ministry.

“No man can make himself a minister (lit. servant) of God, because the calling, message, work, and empowering of genuine ministry to and for God are His prerogative alone to give.”

THE MCARTHUR STUDY BIBLE, 2ND EDITION, THOMAS NELSON, 2019, P 1648)

Observe – Write what you see

... by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

EPHESIANS 3:4-7

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Interpret – What is the Holy Spirit’s intent in these verses?

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Apply – How can you apply these spiritual truths to your life?

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Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:8-9

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ.

When Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner of the Roman government, he was permitted to live by himself with the soldier who guarded him. Three days after he arrived in Rome Paul called the leaders of the Jews together to tell them why he was in Rome in chains. The Jews said that no one in Judea had sent them letters about Paul and no one had spoken any evil of him. What they did want was to hear from Paul about “this sect,” meaning Christianity. They said it was “spoken against everywhere.” (Acts 28:17-22)

A day was appointed when the Jews in Rome would come to where Paul was living and hear what he had to say about Christianity. Paul explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the prophets. Paul talked with them from morning until evening. Some were persuaded by the things Paul said, some were not. Then Paul quoted from Isaiah 6:9-10 and said – “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” The leaders of the Jews left Paul after he said that and disputed among themselves. (Acts 28:23-29)

Paul lived in his own rented house for two years and had the freedom to receive all who came to him – “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.” (Acts 28:30-31) It was during those two years that Paul wrote Ephesians and other letters to help Gentiles understand the mystery of God’s plan for them.

Ephesians 3:8-9 in Greek

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints ... εμοι τω ελαχιστοτερω παντων των αγιων

To me – *εμοι* – this continues Paul’s thoughts from 3:1 – “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles” and 3:7 – “of which I became a minister” .. Paul is sharing his personal insight into the mystery that God gave him .. Paul was the founder of the church in Ephesus, so many of the people reading the letter knew the apostle well ..

who am less than the least of all the saints – τω ελαχιστοτερω παντων των αγιων – ελαχιστοτερω means “very least, less than the least, the smallest, least important” – this is how Paul viewed himself and his readers would know that because of their personal relationship with him .. Paul spent about three years preaching and teaching in Ephesus .. the people there had plenty of time to observe the apostle’s faith and conduct .. they knew Paul to be both

strong in faith and humble in character .. Paul had explained why he viewed himself as “the least of all the saints” in an earlier letter to the church at Corinth – “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” 1 Corinthians 15:9 .. This was not false humility on Paul’s part .. he was humbled that God would use him for such a marvelous purpose after persecuting followers of Jesus in the early days .. (also read Acts 9:1-2; 2 Corinthians 11:30-33) ..

this grace was given that I should preach among the Gentiles – εδοθη η χαρις αυτη εν τοις εθνεσιν ευαγγελισασθαι – Paul understood that what God had given him was special “grace” .. every Christian is saved by grace (*charis*), but the Lord is gracious in many other ways .. we’ll see some of those in the next chapter of Ephesians .. Paul knew that Jesus had been especially gracious toward him through saving grace and special calling grace .. in this case, apostolic grace to preach the Gospel to non-Jews .. Jesus had personally called Paul (Saul) to be the apostle who would take the Gospel of Grace to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22: 22:21; 26:19-23) — “and when James, Cephas,

and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:9) .. as God gives us gifts supportive of our special calling, we also receive special grace for the ministry ..

the unsearchable riches of Christ – τον ανεξιχνιαστον πλουτον του χριστου – the words “unsearchable riches” are *anexichniaston ploutos* .. the word *anexichniaston* means “not able to trace the steps of, impossible to track, cannot be explored” .. it’s the idea of something being “unfathomable, past finding out, beyond comprehension” .. what is “unsearchable” is the “riches of Christ” .. *ploutos* means “wealth, abundance, riches, much in number or quantity” .. the riches of Christ are impossible to track, unfathomable, beyond comprehension .. Paul wrote that Jesus had called him to preach among the Gentiles the “unsearchable riches of Christ” .. what does that mean? Here are some other Scriptures that may help as you study:

But as for me, I would seek God, And to God I would commit my cause— Who does great things, and unsearchable, Marvelous things without number. Job 5:8-9

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable. Psalm 145:3

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. Isaiah 40:28

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! Romans 11:33

What Paul preached, what the Gentiles heard and believing Gentiles received, were spiritual riches beyond human investigation or finding out. Paul started his letter to the Ephesians pointing to those riches in Christ through the Gospel:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:3-6

The unsearchable riches of Christ in the context of Ephesians 3 concern the “dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.”

You can look back at past studies as a reminder, but Paul’s point is that the special grace God had given him to preach to the Gentiles concerned the “unsearchable riches” of Christ concerning the special dispensation of the grace of God and the mystery that Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel. The fact that God would save Gentiles and make them fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the Gospel was

absolutely rich and unsearchable. We know it, but we cannot fathom it. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound!

and to make all see – και φωτίζει παντας – the word *phōtīnai* means “to shine, to enlighten, to reveal, to make evident, to illuminate, to bring to light” .. Jesus sent Paul to the Gentiles to shine a bright light on their absolute need for His salvation ..

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit

together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:1-7

The Gentiles in Ephesus were in deep spiritual darkness (dead in trespasses and sins) until God's grace shone upon them through the Gospel that Paul preached to them. The same was true of Jews. That's why Paul wrote, "among whom also we all once conducted ourselves." Jesus chose Paul to shine a bright light of spiritual hope through the Gospel of Christ. The light of the Gospel was to make all see: Gentiles and Jews.

what is the fellowship of the mystery – τις η κοινωσια του μυστηριου – What Paul wanted all to see concerned the "fellowship" (*oikonomia*) of the "mystery" (*mustēriou*) .. The word *oikonomia* means "household management, administration of household" .. it's the oversight of someone else's property .. this mystery concerned the Church, the Body of Christ, "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit

to His holy apostles and prophets; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” .. this is what God had called Paul to oversee and manage ..

which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God ... του αποκεκρυμμενου απο των αιωνων εν τω θεω .. the word apokekrummenou means “to hide away, conceal, keep secret” .. God knew from the beginning of the ages (really from eternity) what He was going to do in bringing Jew and Gentile together into one new man (Ephesians 2:15) .. it was God’s secret .. it reminds me of what Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 29:29 – “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” .. God has many secrets and reveals some to His people as He wills ..

who created all things through Jesus Christ ... τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι διὰ ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ .. some of the older Greek manuscripts omit the phrase “through Jesus Christ” (e.g. Alexandrian, Claromontane) as do the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions. However you may view that, it’s not a statement that Jesus Christ did not create “all things” since He is God .. Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians in the same timeframe as his letter to the Ephesians and the apostle was clear that Jesus created all things — “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” (Colossians 1:16) .. The Apostle John also made that clear in his Gospel account — “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” (John 1:1-3) ..

Words in the Bible are not a mistake. God inspired them to be written in a certain order. Paul's order in Ephesians 3:8-9 was inspired for a reason. One of the joys of Bible study is to discover that reason.

Observe – Write what you see

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:8-9

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Apply – How can you apply these spiritual truths to your life?

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Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:10

... to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 3:10 in Greek

to the intent ... ἵνα

Verse 10 is a continuation of the sentence started in verse 8, so let's look at that again.

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ

The context is that the Apostle Paul received a special calling to preach “among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery.” When Paul continues with the Greek word *hina*, it’s similar to saying “so that, in order that, for the purpose that.” The next part of the sentence will explain the purpose of the mystery Paul was preaching to the Gentiles.

that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places ... γνωρισθη νυν ταις αρχαις και ταις εξουσιαις εν τοις επουρανιοις δια της εκκλησιας η πολυποικιλος σοφια του θεου

The mystery Paul preached to the Gentiles was about making known “the manifold wisdom of God” to “principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” God is doing that “by the church.” A careful reading of Ephesians makes clear that God is using the Church to demonstrate the ultimate power of Christ to Satan and his evil kingdom.

... and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. Ephesians 1:19-21

... and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6-7

... to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 23:10-11

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Ephesians 6:12-13

The Greek reads a bit different than the English translation. Instead of “that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,” the literal translation is “so that should be made known now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms.”

“should be made known” is *gnōrīsthē* and comes from the noun verb *ginóskó*, which means “to come to know through personal experience, to perceive, recognize.” The idea is knowing something from personal experience, recognizing it and declaring it.

nun is an adverb that speaks to time period — “now, present, immediately, at this instant.” Paul emphasized that this was happening “now,” at the time Paul wrote his letter. It would certainly have continued for the last two-thousand years. This is still happening today.

It’s being made known now to “the principalities and powers in heavenly places.” The word “principalities” is *archais* and means “rulers, magistrates, chief.” The word “powers” is *exousiais* and means “authorities, designated power.” The word is first used in Ephesians in chapter two: “according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” We know from studying Scripture that it refers to Satan.

Satan is a key throughout Ephesians. Why? We need to remember what the Apostle John wrote in his first letter: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Ephesians describes for us how Jesus accomplished that. The “mystery” Paul described was for the purpose of making it known that the “manifold wisdom of God” had

defeated Satan and all his evil kingdom. We see that from chapter one to chapter six.

God chose to demonstrate Jesus' defeat of Satan "by the church." The preposition *dia* means "by, through, through the instrumentality." The Church, made up of every person saved by faith in Jesus Christ, is the instrument God has used for the last two-thousand years to point to Satan's defeat at the hands of our Lord and Savior.

manifold wisdom of God ... η πολυποικίλος σοφία του
θεου

The word *polupoikilos* means "varied, of different colors, many diverse manifestations, multiple facets." The word *sophia* means "wisdom, skill, insight." God is extremely wise and skillful in how He has dealt with the deceitful treachery of Satan and his evil kingdom. Out of all the ways God could have defeated Satan and destroyed the works of the devil, God chose to send His eternal Son to earth as a baby that He would sacrifice His life, die and rise again, and save

many into His Church. God displays His manifold wisdom “by the Church.”

The Church thus becomes the university for angels, and each saint a professor. Only in the Church can the angels come to an adequate comprehension of the grace of God. They at the Church to investigate the mysteries of redemption. Kennet Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Ephesians*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953

That is the “mystery” God revealed to the Apostle Paul and through him to all of the apostles and prophets and to every person saved by grace through faith. Truly remarkable!

Observe – Write what you see

... to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 3:10

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Apply – How can you apply these spiritual truths to your life?

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Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:11

... according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Apostle Paul carefully crafted the theology (knowledge of God) of Ephesians in the first half of the letter (chapters one – three). He brought all of it to the mountaintop of God's purpose when he wrote: "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."

We see there the reason Jesus Christ called Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus:

But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' Acts 26:16-18

Jesus added Saul (Paul) to the ranks of the apostles for the eternal purpose of destroying the “works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Jesus appointed Paul to be “a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Timothy 1:11). Jesus said that Paul would be a witness “of the things which I will yet reveal to you.” Jesus did reveal special things to Paul (2 Corinthians 12) that were part of a mystery “which

from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God.” It is a mystery that God has made known “by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” All of the spiritual powers see through this mystery that Jesus is destroying the works of the devil.

Part of the mystery is what Paul referred to as “the fellowship of the mystery.” Paul explained that in Ephesians 2:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands — that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of

commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:11-18

God confused the one language of all the people of the world (Genesis 11), then chose one man to become the father of a chosen people for Himself (Genesis 12; Deuteronomy 14:2). God created one new man from the two (Jew and Gentile), “thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” That is the great “mystery” Paul preached .. a mystery given to him by Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:11 in Greek

κατα προθεσιν των αιωνων ην εποιησεν εν χριστω ιησου τω κυριω ημων

according to the eternal purpose ... κατα προθεσιν των αιωνων

The mystery Paul preached was according to (kata) the eternal purpose (*prothesin tōn aiōnōn* – purpose of the ages). The New Living Translation calls it the “eternal plan,” which is also a good way to describe it. God predetermined, purposed ahead of time (*prothesin*), that He was going to do what He did through the death and resurrection of the Son of God. This predetermination happened in eternity, not in time. The mystery is not God’s reaction to His plan not working at some point in history. The mystery is that God had a purpose and predetermined a plan that is working.

which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord ... ἣν
ἐποίησεν ἐν χριστῷ ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν

The word “accomplished” is *epoiēsen*. It means “to make or do.” God “made” (created) one new man (Christian) from the two (Jew and Gentile) “by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). God accomplished His eternal purpose/plan “in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Think about that for a minute. God’s eternal purpose was “accomplished” in Christ Jesus. Jesus, the Son of God, is at the center of God’s eternal plan. When Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), He was pointing to the completion of God’s eternal purpose. Jesus died on the Cross and rose from the grave to abolish death and bring life and immortality to the “one new man” He created. That was Paul’s mystery.

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. 2 Timothy 1:8-11

Observe – Write what you see

... according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:11

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Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:12

... in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Ephesians 3 is primarily about the “mystery” (*mustérion*) that the Apostle Paul preached to the Gentiles and Jews. He used the word six times in Ephesians and first mentioned it in chapter one:

... having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ. Ephesians 1:9-10

Paul used the word “dispensation” (*oikonomia*) three times in Ephesians, twice in chapter three.

1. Dispensation of the fullness of the times
2. Dispensation of the grace of God
3. Dispensation (fellowship) of the mystery

The New King James Bible divides Ephesians into three sections concerning the mystery:

1. The Mystery Revealed (3:1-7)
2. Purpose of the Mystery (3:8-13)
3. Appreciation of the Mystery (3:14-21)

Paul wrote in verses eight and nine that God gave him grace to preach the “unsearchable riches of Christ” to the Gentiles. Paul wrote that his purpose was “to make all see what is the fellowship [dispensation] of the mystery.” The purpose of the mystery was “that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” That refers back to what Paul wrote in chapter one and what he would write in chapter six. Paul wrote that this purpose was “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

That brings us now to verse twelve.

Ephesians 3:12 in Greek

in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him ... εν ω εχομεν την παρρησιαν και την προσαγωγην εν πεποιθησει δια της πιστεως αυτου

We find five keys to understanding this verse within its context:

1. in whom we have
2. boldness
3. and access
4. with confidence
5. through faith in Him

“in whom we have” is a translation of the Greek words εν ω εχομεν. “we have” is in the present tense, which means it’s something Paul and the Ephesians had at the time he wrote his letter to them. We also have the same things now. Those things include “boldness and access with confidence.”

It's important to notice that the words "in whom we have" refer back to "Christ Jesus our Lord." Our "boldness and access" is in Jesus.

boldness is παρρησιαν and means "freedom of speech" and carries the idea of making a statement "with resolve" (*rhēsis*), with frankness and confidence in what one thinks and says.

access is προσαγωγην and means "a bringing to, a leading or bringing into the presence of."

προσαγωγην denotes access, with which is associated the thought of freedom to enter through the assistance or favor of another. Vines's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W.E. Vine, MacDonald Publishing

Notice that our boldness and access is "with confidence." The Greek is εν πεποιθησει and means "persuaded, trust, reliance."

How does this happen? “through faith in Him” – δια της ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ ΑΥΤΟΥ

Faith is central to salvation (e.g. Ephesians 2:8-9), Christian living (e.g. Ephesians 3:17), spiritual maturity (e.g. Ephesians 4:13), and spiritual warfare (e.g. Ephesians 6:16). In Ephesians 3:12 we see that having boldness and access with confidence comes through faith in Christ. Every aspect of God’s eternal purpose and plan centers around faith in Christ. God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus, “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Faith (belief) in Jesus is how everyone must begin –

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household. Acts 16:31

... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved Romans 10:9

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Galatians 2:16

Salvation by grace through faith in Christ gives us “access” to God the Father.

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:18

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God

has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:1-5

Adam and Eve had easy access to God in the Garden of Eden. They didn't need "faith" because they walked with God by "sight." However, they lost that easy access to God because of disobedience to God.

... therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man. Genesis 3:23-24

God established a new way for humans to gain access to a relationship with Him and that was "by faith."

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.' Romans 1:17

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Romans 3:28

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Galatians 2:16

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

What humans lost in the Garden, they can regain through faith in Jesus Christ. Those who have faith in Christ have boldness and access “with confidence.”

Observe – Write what you see

... in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Ephesians 3:12

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2. Purpose of the Mystery (3:8-13)
3. Appreciation of the Mystery (3:14-21)

Paul wrote in verses eight and nine that God gave him grace to preach the “unsearchable riches of Christ” to the Gentiles. Paul wrote that his purpose was “to make all see what is the fellowship [dispensation] of the mystery.” The purpose of the mystery was “that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” That refers back to what Paul wrote in chapter one and what he would write in chapter six. Paul wrote that this purpose was “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We come now to verse 13.

Ephesians 3:13

Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Ephesians 3:13 in Greek

Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you ... διο αιτουμαι μη εκκακειν εν ταις θλιψεσιν μου υπερ υμων

One of my mentor professors used to say that whenever we saw the word “therefore” in the Bible, we should ask this question: “What is the therefore there for?” Paul presented clearly in the previous verses of Chapter 3 that God had given him a special calling to preach the Gospel to Gentiles and Jews — especially the Gentiles.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you. Ephesians 3:1-2

Jesus Christ gave Saul of Tarsus (Paul) a specific ministry to the Gentiles — one that would be different from that of the other apostles (e.g. Acts 15; Galatians 2). Jesus gave Paul something called “the dispensation of the grace of God” that was a mystery until Jesus revealed it through Paul.

... how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ). Ephesians 3:3-4

As you might imagine the revelation of this mystery and Paul's preaching of it did not make him popular with Gentiles or Jews. Paul spent almost as much time in prisons across the Roman Empire as he did in preaching the Gospel of Grace in cities and towns as he traveled. Paul knew that his imprisonments caused grief among Christians who knew him. That's why he wrote from prison – "Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you..." Paul didn't want Christians to "lose heart" because of his imprisonments.

The Greek words for "do not lose heart" are *mē enkakein*. The definition of *enkakein* is "faint, be weary." Paul did not want Christians to become "weary" about the tribulations (*thlipseis* – persecution, affliction, distress) he was facing. Paul had brought the Gospel of Christ to them, so they loved him. It was natural for them to be concerned, especially after months and even years in Roman prisons. Christians would become weary, even to the point of losing heart, knowing how Paul was suffering for the Gospel.

which is your glory ... ητις εστιν δοξα υμων

Paul put everything in perspective when he wrote – “which is your glory.” This is an important lesson for Christians today, even as it was almost 2,000 years ago. We misunderstand the idea of “glory” and how it impacts believers. “Glory” (good opinion, praise, honor) to a Christian is different than to an unbeliever. The world views glory in the sense of celebrity, wealth, prestige, renown, “distinction extended by common consent” (Merriam-Webster), etc. The Bible views glory as something belonging to God.

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Psalm 19:1

Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, Give unto the Lord glory and strength. Psalm 29:1

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; Let Your glory be above all the earth. Psalm 57:5

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! Revelation 19:1

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. Revelation 21:23

So, if all glory is to go to God – then why would Paul say that his tribulations for them would be their glory?

A Life of Tribulation

The life God planned for His people includes tribulation. That may sound strange to many people in the Western part of the world because tribulation (persecution, affliction, distress) is not something most of us have experienced in our lives. Christians in many other parts of the world are quite familiar with tribulation, but those in United States (for example) are not.

That, I believe, is naiveté on our part. If we read the Bible and actually believe what it says, then we should know that persecution follows those who believe in Jesus Christ. Paul made that very clear when he spoke to new believers during his first missionary journey.

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:21-23

Notice that Paul told them they would enter the Kingdom of God “through many tribulations.” Not one or two or a few – “many tribulations.” The word “many” is *polus* and means “much, multitudinous, plenteous, great in amount, often.” Without doubt, Christians are headed for the Kingdom of God and we will get there through “many tribulations.”

Paul gives us even more insight into this mysterious “glory” that comes with “tribulations” in the Christian life in his letter to the Romans.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Romans 5:3-5

Here's the secret of tribulations and why Paul told the Ephesians that his tribulations were to their glory. Tribulations produce something very special in our lives:

- tribulation produces perseverance
- perseverance, character
- character, hope

Paul told the Ephesians not to lose heart because of his tribulations because he knew that would build them up in their faith. They would develop perseverance, character, and hope. The unbelieving world hates and persecutes us because it hates and persecutes Jesus Christ (e.g. John 15:18-20). This is not something easy for human to go through, but we can glory in tribulations because we know the purpose God has for them in conforming us to the image of His Son (e.g. Romans 8:28-30). That is the goal and in that we can glory.

Observe – Write what you see

Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. Ephesians 3:13

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Question – Ask and answer questions based on observations

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Interpret – What is the Holy Spirit’s intent in these verses?

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Apply – How can you apply these spiritual truths to your life?

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Observe – Write what you see

One way to outline Ephesians chapter three is:

1. Mystery of Christ Revealed (3:1-7)
2. Mystery of Christ Explained (3:8-13)
3. Mystery of Christ Understood (3:14-21)

Our recent studies have looked at the Mystery of Christ “revealed” and “explained.” We now move into the area of the Mystery of Christ “understood.”

Let’s begin with verse 14 –

Ephesians 3:14 in Greek

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... τουτου χαριν καμπτω τα γονατα μου προς τον πατερα του κυριου ημων ιησου χριστου

For this reason ... τουτου χαριν (of this for reason) ... the word χαριν is an adverb from the word χάρις (grace, kindness, favor) .. the word χαριν is used nine times in the New Testament (mostly by the Apostle Paul) and means “in favor of, for the pleasure of, on account of, for this cause, for the reason of.”

Paul’s usage in 3:14 takes us back to the beginning verse of the chapter where he used the same phrase: “ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles —” In verse one, Paul was referring back to chapter two where we learned that Jesus Christ, our peace, broke down the middle wall of separation and created “in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace” (2:15). Jesus reconciled Jew and Gentile “to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (2:16).

It's important that we don't lose sight of how Paul is establishing Christian doctrine before heading into Christian practice. We must remember what Jesus accomplished on the Cross. It's not how we feel about it; it's what Jesus did about it. Christians are "new." We are different than Jews and different than Gentiles. Jesus created in Himself one new man from the two, "thus making peace." Through Christ "we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (2:18).

As Paul was writing what we know as Ephesians chapter three, he still had chapter two in his sights. As he wrote about the "mystery" that God had revealed to him to reveal to Gentile and Jew, Paul remembered that Gentiles were "no longer strangers and foreigners" as they had been prior to Christ's death on the Cross. Saved Gentiles were "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (2:19). They had been built "on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (2:20). They were part of a great spiritual building, "being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (2:21). The "new man" Jesus created out of Jews

and Gentiles “are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (2:22).

All of that is part of the “reason” (ἕνεκα) Paul referred to in 3:14 when he wrote, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When Jesus said on the Cross, “It is finished,” He accomplished all that Paul had referred to in Ephesians chapters one and two. When we consider what Jesus did for us and every other Gentile and Jew, it should also cause us to “bow” our knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...

καμπτω τα γονατα μου προς τον πατερα του κυριου ημων
ιησου χριστου

The word καμπτω means “to bend, to bow.” Paul used the word in Romans 11:4 when referring to what God told the prophet Elijah – “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” Paul used the word in Romans 14:11 in the context of the Judgment Seat of Christ – “For it is written: As I live, says the Lord, Every

knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God.” Paul used the word in Philippians 2:10 in the context of God the Father exalting God the Son because of His obedience unto death on the Cross – “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.” And, Paul used it in our study text in Ephesians 3:14.

The idea of “bowing” or “bending” the knee in ancient times was to demonstrate obedience and reverence for a sovereign. Paul said that he bowed his knees to the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In this act, we see the apostle demonstrating his appreciation for the great mystery that God had revealed to him, and through Paul to other apostles and all who would read his letters. The “mystery” God has revealed to the world should cause all of us to bow our knees as a demonstration of our appreciation and awe at the eternal plan of God carried out through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

We can call God, “Father,” because of the “Son.” We have “peace with God” because of the sacrifice of the “Son.” We can bow our knees to the Father because of “our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is the “reason” why we have everything we do as God’s saved children.

Ephesians 3:15 in Greek

from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named ... εξ ου πασα πατρια εν ουρανοις και επι γης ονομαζεται

from whom ... εξ ου ... The Greek word εξ means “out from and to, out from whom”.. the context refers back to the “Father.”

the whole family ... πασα πατρια ... the word πασα should be translated “every, every kind of” ... πατρια means “lineage, family, tribe” .. which family or tribe?

in heaven and earth is named ... εν ουρανοις και επι γης ονομαζεται ... “every family in the heavens and on the earth is named” .. God is the Creator of every family in the heavens and on the earth, including humans, angels, and other supernatural beings .. God is the Father of humans .. God is the Father of angels .. God is the Father of the visible and the invisible .. He is the “Father” because He created

everything .. God also “named” all the families in the heavens and on earth .. ονομαζεται means “to give a name” ..

Ephesians 3:16 in Greek

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man ... ινα δωη υμιν κατα τον πλουτον της δοξης αυτου δυναμει κραταιωθηναι δια του πνευματος αυτου εις τον εσω ανθρωπον

This is what Paul prayed for the Gentiles and Jews who were created into one “new man” through the death of Jesus Christ.

that He would grant you ... ινα δωη υμιν ... the word δωη means “to give, to offer” ... Paul bowed his knees to God the Father and ask

according to the riches of His glory ... κατα τον πλουτον της δοξης αυτου ... Paul’s request was based on the “riches” of God’s glory .. that’s impossible for any of us to quantify because God’s glory is beyond anything any of us have witnessed .. πλουτον means “wealth, abundance,

riches, possessions of many kinds” ... δοξης means “opinion which determines value, honor, praise, glory” ... Paul’s request that God grant something to His people is “according to” (κατα) God’s wealth, God’s abundance, God’s riches. What is it that Paul wanted God to do for His children?

to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man ... δυναμει κραταιωθηναι δια του πνευματος αυτου εις τον εσω ανθρωπον

to be strengthened translates from δυναμει κραταιωθηναι (with power to be strengthened) .. δυναμει means “might, power, strength, ability to perform” ... κραταιωθηναι means “to strengthen, become strong, to prevail, attain mastery” ... Paul asked God the Father to strengthen His people, give His people the strength and ability to perform and prevail ... where and how?

through His Spirit in the inner man ... δια του πνευματος αυτου εις τον εσω ανθρωπον ... the “where” is the “inner man” (εις τον εσω ανθρωπον) ... the how is “through His Spirit” (δια του πνευματος αυτου) ... Paul demonstrates yet again the beauty of the Trinity in the lives of Christians ... the apostle called on the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ to strengthen believers “in the inner man” through (διά, through, by, because of) the Holy Spirit ... Paul wrote early in his letter to the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit would play a vital role in the lives of believers ... “you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” The Holy Spirit seals us, guarantees our inheritance, and strengthens us “in the inner man.”

εσω ανθρωπον (inner man) means “inside, within, inner” .. it’s an adverb from the preposition εις, which means “towards, into, unto” .. it literally means “motion into which” .. ανθρωπον (man) means “human, humankind, one of the human race” .. the word includes male and female members of the human race ..

Paul's prayer was specifically for the "inner man." What did he mean by that? The fact that Paul prayed that Christians would be strengthened with might "through His Spirit in the inner man" is the answer. I believe the *εσω ανθρωπον* is where our soul resides and where the Holy Spirit dwells in each of us. The Holy Spirit is Omni-Present, meaning that He is "Everywhere Present at the Same Time." However, the Holy Spirit endues God's people differently than He does unbelievers. For instance, in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit would "come upon" or "fill" an individual for a particular purpose. However, that filling was not permanent. King David pleaded with God not to "take" His Holy Spirit from him:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Psalm 51:10-11

The presence of the Holy Spirit in Paul's writings are different. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1 that the Holy Spirit of promise "sealed" us, and "is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption." Paul wrote in Romans 8 that believers are in the Spirit, "if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." Paul went on to write that "if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3 that Christians are the "temple of God" and that "the Spirit of God" dwells in them.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in a Christian is evidence that the person is in fact a Christian. So, where does the Holy Spirit "dwell" in a believer? In the "inner man" (εσω ανθρωπον). When we die, we do not die. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4 – "Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." Our outward man (ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος) is perishing, but our inward man (ἔσω ἡμῶν) is being renewed (ἀνακαινούται, to

make new) day by day. Why is that? Because the Holy Spirit who dwells in us is renewing us.

The Holy Spirit's ministry of "renewal" began when we were saved, and He keeps renewing us until the guaranteed day of our redemption.

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Titus 3:4-6

We received the Holy Spirit in "abundance" when we were saved, and the Holy Spirit continues to work in us to fulfill God's will for our lives.

There's a lot more to come in this context, but I hope the study gets you excited about what God wants to do in us and for us. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 is a great place to focus.

Observe – Write what you see

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Question – Ask and answer questions based on observations

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Interpret – What is the Holy Spirit’s intent in these verses?

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Apply – How can you apply these spiritual truths to your life?

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Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:17-19

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

The Apostle Paul has been revealing a ‘secret’ (μυστήριον – *mustérion*) that he said God gave to him (Paul). Paul wrote at the beginning of Ephesians 3 that he was ‘the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles.’ He wrote about the ‘dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you.’ Paul wrote that ‘by revelation’ God made known to him ‘the mystery,’ which he described as ‘my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.’ Paul wrote that this ‘mystery’ of God concerning Christ was not known to the sons of men ‘in other ages’ as it had been revealed ‘by the Spirit.’ The

‘mystery’ God gave to Paul was ‘that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.’ That’s a lot to take in, but you can look at previous parts of this series to see how it appears in the Greek.

Ephesians 3 is so pivotal to understanding what God is doing in the Church today, and has been doing since Paul’s ministry, that I outlined it this way –

1. Mystery of Christ Revealed (3:1-7)
2. Mystery of Christ Explained (3:8-13)
3. Mystery of Christ Understood (3:14-21)

We began looking at the Mystery of Christ “understood” in the last part of our study (14-16). We pick up now with verse 17.

Ephesians 3:17 in Greek

that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love ... κατοικησαι τον χριστον δια της πιστεως εν ταις καρδιαις υμων

Paul began in verses 14-16 by revealing his prayer for the Ephesians –

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man ...

Paul's next point is that 'Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.' What did he mean by that?

κατοικέω (katoikeó) is a verb that means 'to settle in, to dwell in, inhabit permanently.' The idea is of settling down as a permanent resident. That's what Paul wanted for Christians. Does that mean Jesus might leave us? No, that's not the meaning or implication of the word.

The purpose of the strengthening by the Spirit is now given, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts." The personal presence of the Lord Jesus in the heart of the believer is not in view here. That is taken for granted. The word "dwell" is *katoikēσαι*, made up of *oikeó*, "to live in as a home," and *kata*, thus "to settle down and be at home." The tense is aorist, showing finality. The expanded translation is; "that Christ may finally settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts." Professor Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in Ephesians and Colossians*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1953

The Gr. verb indicates permanent abode. It is akin to the noun, Ephesians 2:22; where see note. See it used 2 Peter 3:13, of the eternal presence of Righteousness in the New Universe. It marks a residence quite different from transient or casual lodgment. The tense is the aorist (infinitive), and the idea of the aorist is singleness of act. Accordingly, the Lord is viewed here as not merely “dwelling,” but, in a definite act, “coming to dwell,” “taking up abode.” Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

The word ‘hearts’ is καρδία (*kardia*). The ancient Greeks understood the word to mean everything from the physical beating heart in our chest to our mind, will, character, and inner self. Some Greek experts have referred to it as the “affective center of our being” and the “capacity of moral preference (volitional desire, choice).”

How does this happen? ‘through faith’ – δια της πιστεως – the same words Paul used in Ephesians 2:8 about how someone is saved. It is through ‘faith.’

Faith is simply the condition of that indwelling of Christ (comp. Ephesians 2:8), the opening of the door to Him that He may enter in. Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers

There is ‘saving faith’ and ‘living faith.’ What I mean by that is we are saved by ‘faith’ (total trust) in Christ (Ephesians 2:8). Once a person is saved by grace through faith, then it is time to ‘live out’ that faith. This is what Paul was praying for the Christians in Ephesus and every other church that existed in the Roman world and in our world as well. That’s why Paul placed verse 17 in the context of the preceding verse – “to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.” It is the Holy Spirit of God who gives us faith to be saved by Christ and it is the Holy Spirit who gives us faith to live for Christ. We cannot, must not, try to live out the Christian life without a full reliance on God’s Holy Spirit who lives within us.

that you, being rooted and grounded in love – ὑμῶν ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι

This portion is not included in the 1550 Stephanus New Testament, the 1881 Westcott-Hort New Testament, and the 1894 Scrivener New Testament. However, it is included in the SBL Greek New Testament and the Tyndale House Greek New Testament.

The word ‘rooted’ (*errizōmenoi*) is a perfect participle verb (middle or passive) that indicates “to plant, to cause to take root, firmly establish.” The word ‘grounded’ (*tethemeliōmenoi*) means “to lay the foundation” for something.

The words, “being rooted” and “grounded,” are perfect tense participles in the Greek text. They are the result of the strengthening by the Spirit and the consequent at-home-ness of the Lord Jesus in the believers heart and His fellowship with him. The word “rooted” has the idea of securely settled, and “grounded” that of deeply founded. Love here is that

love which the Holy Spirit produces and with which He floods the heart of the yielded saint.” Professor Kenneth Wuest, *Word Studies in Ephesians and Colossians*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1953

In order that ye, having been rooted and grounded in love. Two images are combined to make the idea emphatic – that of a tree and that of a building; denoting what is both the starting-point and the support of the Christian’s life, viz. love. In what sense? The love of Christ is specified afterwards (ver. 19), but this may be as a pre-eminent branch of that manifold love which bears on the Christian life – the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the love of the brethren to one another; and the reciprocal love evoked from the believer by the reception of this love. Evidently it is implied that the Christian life can begin and flourish only in such an atmosphere of love; as warm sunshine is needed to start and advance the life of a plant, so love is needed to start and carry on the life of the soul. Experience of Divine love is a great quickening and propelling power.

“One glance of God, a touch of his love, will free and enlarge the heart, so that it can deny all and part with all and make an entire renunciation of all to follow him” (Archbishop Leighton). Pulpit Commentary

Ephesians 3:18 in Greek

may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height
—εν αγαπη ερριζωμενοι και τεθεμελιωμενοι ινα εξισχυσητε καταλαβεσθαι συν πασιν τοις αγιοις τι το πλατος και μηκος και βαθος και υψος

The Tyndale House Greek New Testament begins with the words ἵνα ἐξισχύσητε, which translates ‘so that you may be fully able.’ Here the Apostle Paul gives us the spiritual reasoning behind what he wrote earlier. He wanted the Ephesians to be able to ‘comprehend’ (καταλαβέσθαι – katalabesthai) with all the other ‘saints.’ The word καταλαβέσθαι means ‘to seize, lay hold of, capture, appropriate, grasp in a firm hold.’ The word ἐξισχύσητε (exischysēte) means ‘to be eminently able, to have full strength.’

What Paul wanted them to eminently able to ‘comprehend’ what was the ‘width and length and depth and height.’

- width – πλάτος – breadth
- length – μήκος – length
- depth – βάθος – fullness, immensity
- height – ὕψος – dignity, eminence

Of what?

Ephesians 3:19 in Greek

to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God – γνωναι τε την υπερβαλλουσαν της γνωσεως αγαπην του χριστου ινα πληρωθητε εις παν το πληρωμα του θεου

The word υπερβαλλουσαν (*hyperballousan*) means ‘surpassing, excel, exceed, transcend.’ The word γνωσεως (*gnōseōs*) means ‘knowledge, wisdom, doctrine.’ The word αγαπην (*agapēn*) means ‘love, to prefer, goodwill, esteem). The words του χριστου (*tou Christou*) mean ‘of the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One.’

This is why Paul prayed for the Ephesians. He wanted them to experience the fullness of Christ’s perfect love for them. Christianity is not about rituals or routines. It’s about the deepest, widest, longest, highest ‘love’ that anyone in this world can experience – the ‘surpassing love of the Christ.’ He wanted them to ‘grasp’ it with all their spiritual strength.

How powerfully the apostle speaks of the love of Christ! The breadth shows its extent to all nations and ranks; the length, that it continues from everlasting to everlasting; the depth, its saving those who are sunk into the depths of sin and misery; the height, its raising them up to heavenly happiness and glory. Those who receive grace for grace from Christ's fulness, may be said to be filled with the fulness of God. Should not this satisfy man? Must he needs fill himself with a thousand trifles, fancying thereby to complete his happiness? Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

Paul is not finished! He also wants them to be filled with all the fullness of God – ινα πληρωθητε εις παν το πληρωμα του θεου. To be 'filled' (πληρωθητε – *plērōthēte*) means 'to make full, to complete.' With what? With 'all the fullness of God'!

The word πλήρωμα (*plērōma*) means 'a full complement, filling to the full.' Imagine that! Being filled with all the fullness of God. That's what Paul prayed for the Ephesians.

When Christ dwells in the heart we have first, love perfecting the faith which roots the life in Him; next, a thoughtful knowledge, entering by degrees into the unsearchable riches of His love to us; and, lastly, the filling the soul, itself weak and empty, up to the perfection of likeness to Him, so renewing and deepening through all time and eternity the image of God in our humanity. Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

That they might be strengthened in the inner man so as to have Christ's living and abiding presence in them, and be lifted thereby to the comprehension of His love and the personal knowledge of that which yet surpasses all knowledge, and at last be filled with all spiritual excellence even up to the measure of the complete perfection that is in God Himself—this is the sweep of what Paul in his prayer desires for these Ephesians so late sunk in heathen hopelessness and godlessness. Expositor's Greek Testament

Observe – Write what you see

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Question – Ask and answer questions based on observations

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Interpret – What is the Holy Spirit’s intent in these verses?

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Apply – How can you apply these spiritual truths to your life?

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Observe – Write what you see

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The way Paul wrote Ephesians divides well into two theological sections: orthodoxy (belief) and *orthopraxy* (practice). Another way of looking at these two sections is that orthodoxy focuses on ‘correct doctrine,’ while *orthopraxy* focuses on ‘correct behavior’ based on correct doctrine (teaching). The first half of Ephesians – Chapters 1 – 3 – focuses strongly on orthodoxy (doctrine). The second half of Ephesians – Chapters 4 – 6 – focuses strongly on *orthopraxy* (behavior).

That's one of the reasons that Ephesians 3:20-21 are so important. Paul has delivered one of the most important and powerful doctrinal lessons in all of Scripture from Ephesians 1:3 – 3:19. Our redemption is in Christ, through His shed blood on the Cross. The Lord is exceedingly great toward those who believe in Him, “according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” God placed “all things” under the feet of Jesus and gave Him “to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Everyone born of flesh was and is “dead in trespasses and sins.” Everyone begins their lives “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” Everyone is “by nature children of

wrath, just as the others.” As hopeless as that may sound, Paul reminded his readers that God is “rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.” Even when we were dead in trespasses, God made us “alive together with Christ.” He “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace In His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” We are “saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” We are God’s workmanship, “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

God also brought Jew and Gentile “near by the blood of Christ.” Jesus is “our peace” and made “both one.” He broke down the middle wall of separation. He abolished the enmity between Jew and Gentile “in His flesh,” that is, “the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace.” Jesus reconciled both Jew and Gentile to God “in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the

enmity.” It is through Jesus Christ that Jew and Gentile “both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” That means we are no longer strangers and foreigners, “but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Paul wrote that it was for that reason that God revealed a ‘mystery’ to Paul, “which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Even though Paul saw himself as “less than the least of all saints,” he knew that God had called him to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created

all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

It was for that reason, Paul wrote, that he bowed his knees to God and asked Him to grant believers, “according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

That is ‘orthodoxy.’ That is ‘doctrine.’ That is what Christians should believe. What comes next is how those doctrines will impact the behavior and practice of Christians, but Paul had one more thing he wanted to write before he addressed ‘orthopraxy.’ His greatest desire was to glorify God in all he did, said, and wrote. We see that wonderful desire in the last two verses of Ephesians chapter 3.

Ephesians 3:20-21 in Greek

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us ... τω δε δυναμενω υπερ παντα ποιησαι υπερ εκ περισσου ων αιτουμεθα η νοουμεν κατα την δυναμιν την ενεργουμενην εν ημιν

Now to Him who is able – τω δε δυναμενω – everything Paul has written so far in his Ephesian epistle is to the ‘One’ who is ‘able.’ Paul began the letter with these words – “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” Everything Paul wrote was ‘by the will of God.’ Everything Paul wrote was for God, “who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” God is ‘able’. The Greek word is δυναμενω and means, ‘have the power, show ability.’ Paul ended the first section of his letter by emphasizing that everything he said God would do is based on God’s ability (power) to do it. That’s a reminder of what Paul wrote in Chapter 1 – “and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to

the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”

to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think – υπερ παντα ποιησαι υπερ εκ περισσου ων αιτουμεθα η νοουμεν – God has the ‘ability’ (power) to do ‘exceeding abundantly above.’ The Greek word for ‘exceeding abundantly above’ is ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ and is made up of the words υπερ, εκ, and περισσου. The idea is of something being ‘superabundantly above or beyond.’ God has that super-ability as the Almighty. He can do things that are far beyond anything we can imagine. The Greek word for ‘ask’ is αιτουμεθα. It means ‘request, petition, ask.’ The word for ‘think’ is νοουμεν and means ‘perceive, understand, conceive, consider, apprehend.’ God’s ability far surpasses our ability to conceive or consider.

according to the power that works in us – κατα την δυναμιν την ενεργουμενην εν ημιν – Paul reminds his readers that there is a supernatural ‘power’ who lives in us. That power is the Holy Spirit. As the apostle wrote earlier, “you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” God lives in us and will do great things that are beyond our ability to consider ‘according to’ (κατα την) the ‘power’ (δυναμιν) that ‘works’ (ενεργουμενην) in us. The word δυναμιν comes from the same root word for the power or ability that God ‘is.’ God lives in us, so we have His ‘power’ living in us.

to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen ... αυτω η δοξα εν τη εκκλησια εν χριστω ιησου εις πασας τας γενεας του αιωνος των αιωνων αμην

to Him be glory in the church – αυτω η δοξα εν τη εκκλησια – this is quite a statement given the history of God’s ‘glory’ appearing in the Hebrew tabernacle and temple thousands of years ago and the glory of Christ on

earth (think the 'Transfiguration'). Interestingly, God's glory left the Temple prior to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 10-11). Jesus told early churches that He would remove their 'lampstand' and even 'fight' against them for their disobedience (Revelation 2-3). The 'glory' of God is not something Christians should take lightly. The word 'glory' is δόξα and means 'honor, renown, praise, highly valued.' God's 'glory' is no longer found in the Temple in Jerusalem. Once it left Solomon's Temple before its destruction, God's glory did not return to the 2nd Temple (unless you view Jesus Christ entering the 2nd Temple as representing God's glory), plus the 2nd Temple was destroyed by the Romans 40 years after Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. Where is God's 'glory' on earth now? 'in the church..' That is the beauty of what God has done for Christians by giving them the Holy Spirit to live in them and energize them for ministry. God's glory lives in His people – Jew and Gentile – created into "one new man" through Christ.

The word ‘church’ is ἐκκλησία and means ‘assembly.’ The ‘assembly’ Paul referred to is made up of all ‘real’ believers, not people who belong to a particular group of people who attend meetings in a building or belong to a particular denomination. There is no ‘glory’ of God living in unbelievers, and many (possibly the majority) of people who think they are Christians are really unsaved. The glory of God does not live in them. That is sad news for members of liberal and progressive churches where all they hear is a ‘false gospel.’

by Christ Jesus to all generations – ἐν χριστῷ ἰησοῦ εἰς πᾶσας τὰς γενεὰς – This amazing spiritual feat came into existence ‘by Christ Jesus’ and it is ‘to all generations.’ The word ‘generations’ is γενεὰς and means ‘race, family, generation.’ Jesus Christ, who is the ‘glory of God,’ lives in His people through the Holy Spirit –

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:13-14

forever and ever. Amen – του αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων ἀμήν – the idea of ‘to all generations’ is that it will remain forever. The phrase του αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων expresses the idea of both the length and quality of a type of existence. The ‘glory’ of God that comes ‘by Christ Jesus’ is promised to all people who become members of the Lord’s family through faith. That glory will continue ‘forever and ever’ –

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. Revelation 21:22-23

Paul ends this great statement of ‘orthodoxy’ with an Amen – ἀμήν – which comes from the Hebrew idea of ‘let it be true.’ Paul wrote great truths for God’s people in the first three chapters of Ephesians. They are doctrinal (teachings) of the Holy Spirit, Who inspired Paul’s writing of this epistle. We can trust what Paul wrote and should believe his writings forever and ever. Amen.

Observe – Write what you see

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

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